

THE NATIONAL PREACHER.

Go....Teach all Nations....Matt: xxviii. 19.

VOL. IV.

NEW-YORK, JUNE, 1829.

No. 1.

SERMON LX.

Preached at Boston, by appointment, before the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Executive Council
and Legislature of Massachusetts, at the Annual Election, May 27, 1829.

By WILLBUR FISK, A.M.

PRINCIPAL OF THE WESLEYAN SEMINARY, WILBRAHAM, MASS.

I PETER, iv. 7.—*But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober,
and watch unto prayer.*

THE circumstances of the public religious teacher are unlike those of most public speakers. These, in most cases, have their subjects specifically marked, and their topics of discourse distinctly proposed. Not so the gospel minister. He has indeed but one object in view,—the moral and religious improvement of his hearers; but to accomplish this object, he may draw his materials from heaven, earth, and hell. Like the great apostle to the gentiles, he determines to know but *one thing* among the people—"Jesus Christ and him crucified,"—but around this proposition, as a common nucleus, gather all the truths of revealed religion. This contains in itself, directly or impliedly, all the doctrines and precepts, the admonitions and promises, of the Bible. In one discourse, however, but a small portion of this vast field can be brought into view. Hence the necessity of selecting such a portion as is best adapted to the circumstances of the audience addressed. The question then arises,—What subject is best suited to this audience? To answer this question satisfactorily, we must inquire, what is the design of a religious discourse and devotional exercises on an occasion like this? Is it a mere indication that the Christian religion is recognised in the principles of our government, and by the great body of our citizens, and therefore, when we induct men into the principal offices of the State, God and his religion must have a passing compliment? If this were all, then the shorter this compliment, the better; and the subject selected, and the time occupied, should be such as would least divert attention from the civic honors and ceremonies of the day. But this is not all:—the reason of these religious exercises is founded in the relation of man to God—in his known proneness to forget God, and in the evident need of religious influence and Divine aid in the responsible duties of administering civil government. Hence the object should be to impress deeply upon the memory and upon the heart, the principles and obligations of our holy religion. While the flag of our country is waving in the breeze, and the rush and the acclamations of thousands give interest and animation to the occasion, it is very proper that the banner of the cross should also be unfurled, the voice of the multitude be hushed, and the civil ceremonies suspended, that we may

gather around the altar of God, to acknowledge, "Thou God seest us," to learn our dependence, and to become deeply impressed with our high responsibility to the court of Heaven. It is for this end that your speaker claims the attention of this audience—claims it not that he, or those of his profession, may share in the political honors of the republic, but that the civil officers of the commonwealth may share in the wholesome instructions and binding motives of the gospel he preaches. The more common course pursued on such occasions is, to point out the duties and qualifications of rulers, and to descant on the blessings of a good government, and the freedom and prosperity of our public institutions. These are appropriate, but they are already better understood than the means by which they are secured, or the motives by which they are enforced. That preaching which is merely didactic, under such circumstances as the present, and before men who know their duty so well, if it should not be actually tedious and irksome, promises little profit. If this audience should be told that rulers must be good men, "fearing God and hating covetousness," that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," that in proportion as men are high in office, their example and influence will be more extensively felt, and that therefore they owe it to their country and their God, to be upright and virtuous,—all this would be important truth, but it might not, under existing circumstances, be the most profitable. To cure the evils of life, and to promote righteousness among men, the work should be commenced at the proper place, and be enforced by proper motives. The religion of the Bible aims at the inner man, and wars with the elements of moral evil in the heart, where alone they can be successfully combated. And to do this effectually, it arrays the transient character of earth and earthly objects, in striking contrast with the eternal and immutable realities of the world to come. "For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This discipline of the inner man, and these more than earthly reasons that enforce it, are both brought into view in the text,—"*Be ye sober and watch unto prayer,*" for "*the end of all things is at hand.*"

We first notice the duty enjoined. It must be acknowledged that an attention to the outward conduct is important, because it is by this that we fulfil the various duties which grow out of the relations we stand in to each other. God alone, directly and clearly reads the heart, and the moral evils there concealed are offensive only to Him. If, therefore, there were no connexion between the heart and the life, with the sinfulness of the former, men, in their various relations to each other, would have nothing to do. But since it is from "the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaketh," and since "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false-witness, blasphemies," it is evident that it is with the heart principally we have to do—especially when we would restrain vice or promote virtue. As teachers of morality and religion, we should have the same regard to the outward conduct that physicians have to symptoms. These show the kind and the malignity of the disorder, but are not the disorder itself. The remedy therefore is to be applied, not to the symptoms, but to the disease. Cure the latter, and the former will cease of course. But you cannot cure the disease by an application of the remedy to the symp-

toms. It is for this reason that the requirements of the divine law are truth in the inward parts, and gospel remedies strike at the very root of sin. To regulate the life, therefore, and to qualify the man for all the duties of life, there must be a moulding of the *heart*,—a fashioning of the soul to *sobriety*, *circumspection*, and *devotion*. And this is what is enjoined in the text. Indeed the requirements of the text imply the whole of a religious character; and very distinctively mark the difference between *him that serveth God*, and *him that serveth him not*: for they have respect unto the judgment and the affections, unto the temper of the mind and the exercises of the heart; and inculcate a vigilant and an untiring energy, that guards against the corruption of the one, or an alienation of the other. He who is but slightly acquainted with his own heart, or has marked with any attention the prevailing character of man, knows well the proneness of the heart to become supremely attached to the world, and wholly engrossed with the concerns of time. Almost all the evils which cluster around the soul, or disparage the life, are engendered here. And he alone is cured of this idolatry of the heart, whose prudent mind puts a sober and judicious estimate upon the things of earth, and restrains the passions and appetites within temperate and reasonable bounds. But however well disciplined the soul may be; however subdued the passions; however sound the judgment, or regular the life; yet in this contagious and infectious world, the sober mind may become perverted, and therefore *watchfulness* is one of the leading characteristics of true religion. The spirit of irreligion is heedless of the errors, and reckless of the dangers, to which the soul is exposed—slothful and self-confident, it keeps no guard against the world, the flesh, and satan. The spirit of true religion is the reverse of all this; it is wary and guarded against temptation. Under its influence the heart is kept with all diligence,—every avenue to the soul is guarded, and every sense is awake to duty and to the coming of Christ.

The spirit of irreligion is the spirit of pride, of self-dependence, and of forgetfulness of God. Humble adoration and sincere worship are not in accordance with the spirit of the world. It is said of Saul of Tarsus, by the Holy Spirit, to remove the doubts of one who justly suspected his character, "Behold, he prayeth;" as if this were enough to prove him a sincere Christian. But had he never prayed before? In the forms of prayer he had doubtless often engaged. And so have many worldly men—and have even thought themselves devout, perhaps, while they had at heart the same kind of opposition to Jesus of Nazareth with Saul of Tarsus. Never, till he saw his heart and felt his sin, could it be truly said of Saul, Behold he prayeth! And so of all others. The spirit of prayer, therefore, very clearly designates the spirit of true religion. He who feels it, has contrition for sin, gratitude for mercies received, adoration and humble veneration for the character of God, supplication for needed blessings, and submission of himself and all his interests into the hands of God.

From this concise view of the subject it appears, that the qualities and exercises of heart required in the text are the grand features and distinguishing marks of the truly pious. And such as they are at heart, such they will be in their outward walk. Hence we may understand the apostle as

saying—Be ye holy in heart and life, be ye the humble worshippers and faithful servants of the most High God, watching against sin and over your own hearts and lives with all caution and diligence, that ye may thereby secure a treasure and an inheritance beyond the bounds of time and of earth; and so much the more because time and all its interests, earth and all its concerns, are coming to a speedy end.

Our next object will be to show how the consideration that the end of all things is at hand, is suited under all circumstances, to make the mind *sober, watchful, and prayerful*.

On the subject of the dissolution of the world there is doubtless much skepticism in the minds of many. It is still asked, "Where is the promise of his coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning?" That the earth has never been dissolved is no argument, however, that it never will be. But rather because we are told by the word of God it will be, and as yet it never has been, the event is therefore to be expected. And even the changes that have taken place are strong indications that there may be other great changes in the present constitution of things. We are informed in sacred history, and this is corroborated by ancient tradition, and by the present state of the earth, that this world, as it once existed, was overflowed by water and perished. And this is produced as analogical proof by the inspired author of our text, that "the heavens and earth which are now, are kept in store reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." "For the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up:" Yea, "all these things shall be dissolved." And it is not certain that the established laws of nature need be reversed to accomplish this dissolution. Astronomers tell us of comets which threaten at some future day to approach so near the earth, as finally to be attracted to it with a force that may shatter it to its centre, and with a heat that may dry up its waters, melt down its mountains, and utterly consume it, as the fire from Heaven consumed the altar and sacrifice of Elijah. Philosophy teaches that a latent fire pervades all matter, which, of itself, if liberated, would be sufficient to wrap this globe in one universal conflagration; as also of an electric fluid or ethereal fire, that may be called into operation, and made to "pass through the aqueous particles of the atmosphere, and produce innumerable explosions—frequent, loud, confounding, and terrific, beyond every comprehension but that of God himself." How exactly does this answer to the prophetic description of the apostle; "The elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall pass away with a great noise." These elements now occasionally break out, as if impatient of restraint; and should they all, or any one of them, be once brought into general action, the work of dissolution is accomplished. But in whatever way the event is brought about, we are taught to expect it; and with it, there are results and consequences that seriously affect the interests of the human family and demand our careful and solemn attention.

1. The sublimity and grandeur of this scene are, of themselves, suited to draw off the mind from earth and impress it with sentiments of sobriety and

awe. The resurrection of the dead, the gathering of the nations, the rocking of the world and its conflagration, the explosions and intonations of the atmosphere, the warring and wild uproar of the elements, "the shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God," all unite to make this a scene of inconceivable sublimity. One single feature in this grand exhibition will far exceed all the events and ceremonies which in this world appear so imposing. What is the inauguration of a President, or the coronation of an Emperor, compared with the coronation, on that day, of one of the least in the kingdom of Heaven? What is the mustering of armies, compared with the assembling of all the generations of men, both of the quick and the dead? What is the roar of cannon, or the eruption of the volcano, compared with the shaking and melting down of this terraqueous globe? Man is susceptible of moral impressions, from the contemplation of grand and sublime objects. Whether this moral influence is direct, or through the association of ideas, it matters nothing to the present argument. The fact admitted, it follows that the impression made and the moral effect produced, will correspond with the character of the object contemplated and the light in which it is viewed. Whatever therefore is imposing in earthly exhibitions is apt to dazzle the mind and captivate the heart. Hence, we see sedate age and buoyant youth, the intelligent and the ignorant, rushing on to such scenes, to see the gathering, and hear the shouts, and witness the ceremonies. And the more splendid they appear, the more the heart of the charmed beholder becomes attached to the earth as the seat of every thing interesting and desirable. All the sensations that are raised by these earthly scenes are earthly; they feed earthly affections; excite ambitious hopes, and strengthen the whole train of worldly feelings. To counteract these, and to call the soul away from earth, what is better suited than the consideration of the closing scene of time and the attendant circumstances? How trifling would the grandest scenes of earth appear amidst those contemplations that make the soul familiar with the coming of the King of kings in the clouds with power and great glory, the descending of the New Jerusalem from God out of heaven, the acclaim of the heavenly hosts, the confusion of dissolving elements, and the glare of a burning world!

2. This leads to another view of the subject, closely connected with the foregoing. It has been already assumed, and no evidence need be adduced to prove the assumption, that the root of sin, and that from which spring forth the various branches of a sinful life, is an inordinate attachment to this world. This attachment stands opposed to all holiness; for "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The strength of this love can only be rated by the force with which it impels the soul forward in its earthly pursuits. The objects presented seem so desirable, that the pursuer is not scrupulous about the means of obtaining them. Trifling deviations from rigid virtue are at first indulged; afterwards, still greater departures, until crimes of the deepest dye are perpetrated. Are the honors and offices of the world presented as objects of pursuit? What tricks of electioneering are resorted to; what

questionable strokes of policy, what time-serving, what misrepresentations, envyings and strifes are produced; and all this too among honorable men! Is wealth the object of pursuit? The man's haste to be rich destroys his innocency: and so of all the other unholy passions. And in vain will you attempt to hedge in the soul, and prevent its breaking over due bounds to secure its object. So long as hope promises, and the crown glitters, the love of having and the desire of enjoying will urge their gratification, with an irresistible influence; virtue fades, conscience is smothered, and all the moral feelings are blunted or perverted.

It gives us pleasure indeed to be able to state, that many men who are not under the immediate and controlling influence of heavenly affections, are nevertheless far from having arrived to the point of depravity just alluded to. But this makes nothing against the argument. The tendency is to this; and where worldly motives prevail, this will be the result. When a man's principles and conduct are guarded only by worldly motives, what guaranty have we that he will give due heed to the principles of moral integrity? It may be considered as an axiom in morals, that undue and unholy attachments lead to undue and unholy means of gratification. When, therefore, the spirit and love of the world sway the mind, who can tell where the erring principles of the soul will be stayed? "Every man, when he is tempted, is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed; then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." Under this influence, the mind cannot be approached by the sober truths of the gospel, nor affected by the feelings of devotion, until these prospects are blasted, or their fancied brightness obscured. Here therefore, we see the need of the motives in the text; and the connexion these motives have with the object to be gained. The object to be gained is purity of heart and purity of life. Against this the world opposes its influence. Its honors dazzle, its riches allure, its pleasures invite, its prospects promise; and however deceitful and unsubstantial all these are in fact, yet, by the magic of a sinful delusion, they appear to the mind appareled in inexpressible loveliness. If the delusion remains unbroken, who can withstand it? Vain is the attempt to fortify the mind and strengthen the moral powers of the soul. The power that draws the soul to earth is irresistible, until the attractive influence is broken: and this can only be done by showing the man the unsubstantial and valueless character of the phantom he is pursuing. He must be made to see and feel, that "the end of all these things is at hand,"—that we all do fade as a leaf, and the glory of man is as the grass that withereth, and the flower that falleth off;—yea, that nature herself is doomed to dissolution, and that the throne of man's highest elevation is crumbling to dust. And when once the mind is impressed with these sentiments, the principal barrier to a sober, watchful and prayerful life will be removed, and the way will be prepared to admit the purifying influence of high and heavenly motives. Hence,

3. The consideration urged in the text is suited to lead the mind to moral purity, because closely connected with the dissolution of the world, is the consideration of the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." It seems abundantly to accord with all consistent ideas of the

divine economy, and with the scriptural account of the subject, that when this earth shall be burned up, and the heavens which now are shall pass away with a great noise, there will be, as respects man, a new constitution of things. There shall be, we are told, "new heavens and a new earth," which shall be emphatically and universally "a habitation of righteousness." And there, saith an apostle, "will be the city of the New Jerusalem, and among the habitations of men shall be the tabernacle of God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." This description, than which nothing is more simple or more expressive, brings into view objects that are suited to arrest the attention and engage the affections, when they are taken off from this world. And this is all-important. For it is essential to the soul that it love something, or be utterly miserable. Its guilt, therefore, is not that it *loves*, but that it loves wrong objects. Of course the affections are not to be destroyed, but transferred. It accords therefore with sound philosophy, that when the affections are to be separated from earthly objects, they are to be invited to higher and nobler attachments. And this is precisely the philosophy of the Bible. The same inspired prediction which blots out one world, creates another; and the same authority which prohibits placing affections on things on the earth, directs to place them on things above. If earthly crowns are fading, nevertheless there is a crown that fadeth not: though riches make to themselves wings and fly away, yet there are durable riches and an incorruptible inheritance; and though the pleasures of life are deceitful and transient, yet at God's right-hand are pleasures for evermore. Thus at the very time the soul is called off from objects in their nature defiling, it is brought into connexion with those which are purifying. For, while on the one hand it is impossible for the heart to be attached to this earth supremely, without cherishing pride and vain ambition, and all that is "earthly, sensual, and devilish," so when by a view of the certain and speedy destruction of this mundane system, the soul is induced to turn its attention and fix its affections on things which are above, the influence is most salutary;—it draws around the heart every thing virtuous and noble, and the soul, by its association with whatsoever things are true, pure, lovely and of good report, is changed into the same image, and becomes imbued with that wisdom which is from above, "which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

This connexion of the soul with such elevating and purifying associations must also have a most salutary influence upon the *life*; not only because, as we have seen, these associations, in their very nature, tend to counteract that narrow selfishness so natural to the earthly mind, and to mould the soul into an expansive and heavenly benevolence, but also because all the motives to encroach upon the rights of others, are hereby removed, and every inducement to do good to our fellow-men is brought into view. For in the objects of affection and pursuit here presented, there are no conflicting interests, and therefore no occasion for competition. The elevation of one is no cause of the failure of another,—hence there is no ground for envying, reviling, and

revenge. There are honors, riches, pleasures, mansions, crowns and thrones for all ; and the more virtuous and beneficent they are, the more secure the reward, and the richer the inheritance.

4. These thoughts are closely connected with another consideration, which deserves distinct and particular notice. The text implies that at, and after, the destruction of the world, man will have a conscious state of being, and a state too, on which his present character and conduct will have a decisive influence. Otherwise the apostle's argument would be futile and childish. For why should he urge sobriety, circumspection, and prayer, from the motive that all things were coming to an end, if the duties here enjoined had no bearing upon our future state ? And the same may be asked of other passages. " Seeing," saith another text, " all these things must be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ?" And again,—“ Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” At that day, we are taught, the wicked shall perish ; “ for the heavens and the earth, which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” Yea, it is when “ the heavens and the earth flee away, so that there is found no place for them, that the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.” And this idea, so frequently presented in the Bible, is confirmed by reason and the fitness of things. Separate time from its connexion with eternity, and it becomes an unmeaning point. What are all its relations and duties, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears ? But join time with eternity, and connect them by those ties which grow out of responsibility and retribution, and every thing appears consistent and rational. God himself has attached great importance to this earth and its inhabitants. He has displayed, by its creation, his eternal power and godhead. He has thrown up its mountains in majesty, and spread out its valleys in beauty, and fitted it up with wondrous accommodations for the residence of man. And he has attached additional importance to our existence here, by providing for our moral discipline. To this end all his providences are directed, and all the revelations of his will. He has given a law to his creatures, and his concern for their obedience is manifested in all the encouragements and promises, the cautions and threatenings of the Bible ; and especially in all the provisions of the gospel. “ For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Now why this preparation ? why this discipline ? why this care and solicitude manifested for man in his present state of existence ? We can account for it on no other principle, than that much is depending upon this portion of existence, much that is of vast moment to the soul, and much that will not be fully disclosed, until that day when “ the earth and all things that are therein, shall be burned up.” Then shall it be seen why heaven's King wept over the rebellious and incorrigible, and why heaven's hosts rejoice over repenting sinners. For then those “ that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt ; and they that

he wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Then shall the evidences of the past be examined, and the destinies of the future be unfolded, and then shall it be clearly seen, why this life, short as it is, and why this world, in itself so unsubstantial and fading, should nevertheless have attached to them such a weight of importance, and draw around them such an eternity of interest.

It is evident, from the foregoing considerations, that this earth is only a theatre, on which the Almighty and the Allwise exercises his subjects awhile, to try their fidelity and test their love ; and that this life is only a day of grace through Christ, and of moral discipline, preparatory to a more permanent state of being. Whenever, therefore, we are urged to a virtuous and holy life by the argument, that "the end of all things is at hand," we are expected to take into view the consequences to ourselves, connected with this event. How important is it, therefore, that we inquire seriously,—where shall *we* be, and what *our* condition, amid "the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds?" This inquiry the Scriptures have answered, and answered too, in a manner to give full force and influence to the foregoing argument. "For if God spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly," then, indeed, he "knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

Here is the grand lever of Scripture motives ; and the fulcrum on which it rests is placed far beyond the range of time, and the bounds of a dissolving world. Here it *should* rest, and *thence* must be derived the power that moves it. For none but such a power can counteract the gravitating influence of earth, and give to the affections a high and holy elevation.

It is on the ground of the close connection of our conduct here, with the moral consequences connected with the dissolution of the world, that it could in truth be said, when these words were first penned, and to all the generations since, "The end of all things is *at hand*." For although many generations have passed away since that period, and the end is not yet, still the relation between the termination of life and the end of the world, is so intimate, that the consequences of the one are, in point of fact, the consequences of the other. Or more properly, the latter will be the period when the character which has been forming in life and is finished at death, will be fully developed and adjudged. The evidences on which this trial shall proceed, and the decision be grounded, may have been sealed up for centuries ; still as they are taken and reserved in special reference to that event, the mind is constantly cited to that period, as the one in which the character of each shall pass the test, and his destiny be fixed. And this character is soon to be finished ; so that all that is interesting and momentous to any man, all that can affect his *weal* or *woe*, in relation to that or any future event, will, in a short time, be accomplished. Yea, it is probable, that, immediately upon the death of the body, the departed spirit enters into such a meditation of the past, and contemplation of the future, as will be preparatory to, and almost a participation of, the final decision. So that, in fact, the circumstances

which relate to that event, which render it greatly to be desired, or awfully to be dreaded, will at death crowd around the soul, and infix their thrilling pleasures, or poignant pangs, with such certainty of anticipation, as to render the whole, not only in its preparatory process, but in its almost opening realities, already begun. Well, therefore, in relation to the moral consequences to the soul, may it be said to every successive generation, "the end of all things is *at hand*."

And well may this subject be urged, to wean the soul from earth, and raise it to higher attachments and nobler pursuits. To believe and to feel these truths would be our salvation ;—to doubt them is our ruin. The more, therefore, the pursuits of men are calculated to sensualize the mind, the more engrossing their cares, and the more winning and fascinating the events that pass around them, the more earnestly should it be proclaimed in their hearing, "*The end of all things is at hand*." And perhaps there is no situation in which man can be placed, where the mind is more liable to be engrossed with something short of the realities of eternity, than amid the busy cares and flattering honors of public life. This proclamation, therefore, should be made in our legislative halls, in our courts of justice, and in our popular assemblies, until it shall have sobered all the levities, and chastened all the excesses, and humbled all the aspirings of this erring life.

To damp our earthly joys,
T' increase our gracious fears,
For ever let the Archangel's voice
Be sounding in our ears.

Is it whispered that such thoughts may be intruded unseasonably upon the mind ? We answer—No ! never ! never ! What is designed to influence the whole life, and indeed to have bearing upon a whole eternity, should be always present. If at one time more than another, some wish to forget it, this is the time when, and these are the persons to whom, this subject should be especially presented. And if there are any who read, in the dissolution of the world, the destruction of their joys and the annihilation of their hopes, and to whom, therefore, this theme may be gloomy and unwelcome, such feelings clearly indicate that they, of all others, need to have it pressed upon them. For they are the ones whose hearts are not right with God. If their treasure were in heaven, and their hearts there, no such gloom would hang over this subject.

Neither should this subject be dispensed with, though some should be skeptical, and doubt the coming of such an event. So it has ever been with the world, in relation to the threatened judgments of God. He has given timely warning, but the transgressor has often doubted till he was ruined. God warned the inhabitants of the old world, before the deluge ; he warned the inhabitants of Sodom and the cities of the plain, before their dreadful overthrow ; he warned the Jews, before the destruction of Jerusalem ; but all these warnings were disregarded as idle tales. *They ate, they drank, they married and were given in marriage, they bought and sold, planted and builded, until the flood, the fire, and the enemy destroyed them all.* One event remains !

one awful and final catastrophe!—long predicted, often alluded to, and delayed only, until the fulness of time shall come. But it will come, and will not tarry. “For the heavens and the earth shall perish, yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shall God change them, and they shall be changed.” But God endureth for ever, and his word shall never fail. “He is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering towards our world, and not willing that any should perish.” It is for this cause that he delayeth, and sendeth his word and his messengers, to warn the sons of men of their danger and to hasten them to their duty. And shall we doubt and perish? Must our ruin be the only evidence that will convince us? Shall we, like those of old, *eat and drink, build and plant, buy and sell*—shall we seek honor and pleasure, wealth and office, thoughtless of the future, and reckless of our danger, until we see “our God in grandeur and our world on fire?” O what is man! how slow in heart to believe, how dull in feeling, not to tremble at the threatened judgments of the Almighty! “O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.” Then would they become emulous of a crown that fadeth not, and of a throne that crumbleth not, and of pleasures at God’s right hand for evermore.

But I am admonished that it is time to come to the accustomed congratulations of the occasion, and so conclude.

His Excellency the Governor, and the other officers and members of the Executive and Legislative Departments, will accept our cordial felicitations for the honors conferred on them by the free suffrages of an enlightened people. Of all offices in the world, those conferred thus, and under such circumstances, are the most desirable and the most flattering. We love and respect the rulers of our own choice; and we doubt not but such rulers love and respect us. We are yours, and you are ours. Strong and endearing ties! Well may it be said of such, at least so far as the political interests of our country are concerned,—Happy rulers, over a happy people! But while I am permitted thus publicly to be the organ of these congratulations, you will suffer me, I doubt not, to present them in full view of the preceding subject, and of the need you have, for all the motives here furnished, to enable you amidst the cares and honors of public life, to be sober, watchful, and prayerful. For the more interesting and honorable your relations to society, the greater your danger of being too much engrossed by them. Faithfulness and diligence in the duties of your respective offices do indeed become you; nor are you required to be indifferent to the confidence, honors, and affection of your fellow-citizens. Our fault is not, that we feel an interest in the duties and concerns of time, but that this interest is not always regulated by a regard to the connection of time with eternity. Who would build the temple of his fame, and the palace of his pleasures, on the sand? Yet he builds thus, who loves the world for its own sake. But if, through all the relations and duties of time, you feel and act with due respect to the events of the *great day*, then will you fill up your respective spheres, with pleasure, with interest, and with integrity; and in the end it shall be said to each of you—*Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

SERMON LXI.

BY JUSTIN EDWARDS, D.D.

BOSTON, MASS.

I PETER, IV. 7.—*But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.*

It is one of the striking evidences of human depravity, and of its power over the mind, that men can live as if they were at home in this world, and confine their views, affections, and efforts, to the objects of time. It would seem, at first, to be impossible, that rational creatures, born for immortality, and whose happiness to endless ages depends upon placing their affections on things above, should be able to confine them to things below; especially after God has told them, that *the end of this is death*.

But we know from observation that they can do it, and from woful experience that they love to do it. Although admonished by the pains which they feel in their own bodies, by the warning voice of conscience, the testimony of dying friends, and the declarations of the Holy Ghost, that they have no abiding place on earth, still they seek this world as their chief good; and not unfrequently they continue to do this till the last hour of life, and neglect the great salvation till their souls are lost for ever.

But they can never say that they do this without warning. God has told them, *the time is short*; and they *know not what a day may bring forth*. "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

The end here spoken of, some have supposed to be the end of the Jewish nation, when their city and temple were destroyed, and eleven hundred thousand were swept into eternity. But it more naturally leads our minds to the end of the world; when not a temple, or a city merely, but the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat, the earth, and all that is in it, be burnt up, and the scenes of time be swallowed up in an opening and boundless eternity.

Although it may be ages before this shall take place, yet, compared with eternity, *it is at hand*. All the time between this and the end of the world, when it is past, will look like a dream when one awakes.

But the end to *you*, my hearers, and to *me*, is much nearer than this. All the concern that we shall ever have with things below, is confined to the time in which we live. And what is your life? A vapour, which appears, and vanishes away. And must we at death drop all connection with things below? Surely, then, *the end is at hand*. I shall, therefore,

I. Illustrate this truth; and,

II. Point out the duties to which it calls us.

1. A thing is said to be at hand, when it is so near that we can reach it; or so near that it may come on us, or we may meet it, at any time. In this sense, the end of all things is at hand. It is so near that it may meet us at any time. Wherever we go, whatever we do, when we lie down, and when we rise up, when we go out, and when we come in, the next thing may be, the end. There is not a moment of life in which we are not exposed, without warning, to meet death. Even if we have laid out plans for years, and are engaged in

them with all the heart, still we may be called to leave them, just where they are, for other hearts to enjoy, and other hands to accomplish. You may have known a man with fair opening prospects, perhaps he had bought him a farm, and begun to make great improvements; or had built him a house, and expected soon to occupy it, and find a settled habitation; or he had engaged in merchandise, and laid the foundation for long and prosperous business; he intended to prosecute it for years before he should close his concerns; his treasures were wafted by every wind, and his agents were seen in every clime; but suddenly his business stopped; his plans were broken; the end had come, and the man was a corpse. Even if he had done nothing to prepare for death, and it was certain, should he then die, that he would sink to perdition, still he could not stop a moment; prepared or unprepared, he must go, and enter upon the endless retributions of eternity. Ah! he should have watched, and laid up his treasure in Heaven; then he had been ready; and when absent from the body, he had been present with the Lord, beholding his glory and rejoicing in his love.

I once saw an infant smiling in its mother's arms; she rocked it in her cradle; and her heart leaped for joy as she thought how it would soon delight her with its half-formed accents, and be the solace of her heart for many future years; but the hand of death touched it, and her hopes, and her infant, sunk together into the grave! Have pity upon her, O ye her friends, have pity upon her, for the hand of the Lord hath touched her.

Your child perhaps lived till he could surprise and delight you with his opening and vivid intelligence; and by presenting every day some new attraction, bind a new cord around your heart; but a fall, or a fever, the fire, or the water, or some other messenger of the Lord, broke all asunder, and there was a wound which nothing but the balm in Gilead, and the Physician there, could heal.

Your neighbor's child lived till he had risen, perhaps, to manhood, and engaged in the active concerns of life. It may be he had freighted a vessel, and gone to a distant country; and after years of painful absence, his friends were expecting his return. Their hearts leaped for joy as the vessel approached; they hastened down to meet him; but, ah! he was gone;—the end had come, and they shall never more behold him, till the last great day. No age, no condition, no prospects, keep off death. With regard to every individual, *the end of all things is at hand*. I shall now, therefore,

II. Point out the duties to which the subject calls us: "Be ye sober, and watch unto prayer."

1. *Be ye sober*. This applies to the body, and to the mind. It means, abstain from outward dissipation, and from inward idolatry. Let your appetites, your passions, and your affections, be governed by the Bible. When the means of gratifying appetite, or exciting passion, appear before you, or when you are tempted to place your hearts on the world, remember that you must die. On earth you are a stranger, passing quickly to your eternal home. Let this truth sink deep, regulate your appetites, govern your passions, and take off your hearts from the things below. They will soon be to you as though they had never been; except as to the effect which your having had them, and used them, will have on your character and your future condition; this will last for ever. Keep this in view, and look not at things seen and temporal, but at things unseen and eternal.

Even those who profess to believe God, are often excessively devoted to this world. They are lifted up by its smiles, or cast down by its frowns. They are so anxious to obtain it, are so disappointed if they cannot, or so envious towards those who can, that they have no rest: and sometimes they continue

this course, till they are on the brink of the bottomless pit. My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped, I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; they have no bonds in their death; their strength is firm; they are not in trouble as other men are; their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart can wish; while the poor Christian turns from overwhelming disappointment, and sorrows of a full cup are wrung out unto him, and he is tempted to say, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence, for I am plagued all the day, and straitened every moment. But let him go up into the temple of the Lord, and in the light of eternal ages, view their end. O! Thou castest them down into destruction, and they are desolated in a moment!

The sight of this should banish all envious, all covetous, and all discontented feelings from the minds of Christians. On earth they are pilgrims, never to rest till they arrive in glory. There is but one rest that remaineth for the people of God. They cannot find it, they ought not to expect it, till they pass over Jordan. Clusters indeed from that land of promise they *may* expect; they might have them often, to cheer and strengthen them on their journey, would they pass by the poisonous fruits of the wilderness, and leave an example which should testify to those who come after, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Still the permanent joy which they will here experience, should they be as holy as Moses, as heavenly-minded as Daniel, and as active for God as Paul, compared with what they will have in Heaven, can be only as a drop to the boundless ocean. And yet their joy on earth may be unspeakable and full of glory. What then will it be in Heaven, as they behold the face of Christ, see him as he is, and are for ever *like* him? How great then the folly, and how tremendous the guilt, of giving up those joys for these trifles!

But those joys no man can obtain, without, while on earth, being sober; governing his appetites, his passions, and his affections, by the Bible. What he knows to be sin, he must renounce; and what he knows to be duty, he must perform, let the self-denial be what it may. If a man lives in what he *knows* to be sin, or continues to neglect what he *knows* to be duty, vain is that man's hope of Heaven. It does not purify him; it is not the hope of the gospel; and it will be like the spider's web, when God taketh away the soul.

Would you, my hearers, have that hope which maketh not ashamed? Form no plans, engage in no business, speak no words, indulge no feelings, but what you really believe, after all the light that you can gain, God will approve. Let, *Thou God seest me*, be written upon your hearts, and under it, *Thy favor is life, and thy loving-kindness is better than life*. In keeping his commands, fear not those who can only kill the body; but fear *Him* who can kill also the *soul*. Whatever be the consequences, let his will, at all times, and in all places, govern you. Trust in Jesus Christ, and make it your great object to obey *all* his commands. This is of infinite moment, not only to you, but to all who may succeed you. You may soon die; but you leave an *example*, the influence of which can *never* die. Suppose you are a parent, and neglect the Lord Jesus; your example, long after you are dead, may lead your children to neglect him; and their example may lead their children to neglect him; and thus the influence may extend to the end of time. Nor once imagine that you do no evil, merely because you are not openly immoral. If you neglect the Lord Jesus—if you do not *live for him*—you may do greater evil than men or angels can describe.

Nor once imagine, on the other hand, that you cannot do great good, because you may not have great talents, learning, property, or influence. Let all that you have, be it more or less, be devoted to Christ, and you may, through grace, do greater good than Gabriel can conceive.

The reading of the life of David Brainerd, led Henry Martyn to resolve that

he would be a missionary, and spend his life in translating the Bible, and preaching the gospel to those who had never heard of Christ. In pursuance of this resolution, he left his father's house, his native country; and although he died a young man, he had preached the gospel to thousands, who before had never heard it; and translated the whole of the New Testament into Hindostanee, and also into Persian; languages in which it was before unknown, and in which it will be read by millions to all future generations. Such was the influence of David Brainerd, more than half a century after he was dead, on a single man, more than three thousand miles from the place where he lived and died. And upon how many other men has the life of Brainerd produced an influence which will be felt when the earth and heavens are dissolved!

But Brainerd, you say, was a *minister*, and no doubt ministers should be holy men, because they are in public stations, and their influence is important; but we are private Christians, in obscure stations; and can there be any such great good accomplished by our example and influence? A woman in a private station had a little child, whom she early taught the truths of the Bible by means of the tiles in the chimney. And that child was Philip Doddridge; whose influence is felt through kingdoms, and will continue to be felt, till the kingdoms of this world are no more.

Another woman in a private station, had a son, with whom she often prayed; but, called of God, she left him motherless before he was five years old. Her instructions, however, and her prayers, after twenty years of wickedness, awakened in his bosom compunctions of conscience, and brought him to deep repentance. That man was John Newton; who afterwards became a minister, and was the means of bringing hundreds, and probably thousands, of others to repentance; among whom was *one*, whose "Star in the East" has electrified Christendom; and *another*, whose "Family Bible" is now read by fifty thousand families, and will help forward millions to glory.

So much can be *seen*, even in this distant world, and while looking through a glass darkly, to be connected with the fervent prayers and pious labors of one obscure woman, who had no greater means of exerting an influence on the world, than has every mother in this assembly. Could you look forward and trace the influence of that one obscure woman through a few of the unnumbered ages of eternity,—O what a prospect!—And such a prospect, my friends, if you will live for Christ, and devote your all to him, may open before each one of *you*. And what are the little concerns of kingdoms, and empires, and worlds, compared with the glory of turning many to righteousness, and shining as the stars in the firmament, and as the sun in his strength, for ever and ever!

The good which you may do, does not depend so much on the greatness of the influence which you exert, as it does upon the *kind*. Let all the influence which you have, be for Christ, and you will accomplish a good, the greatness of which will be the theme of adoring praises, from multitudes that no man can number, to endless ages.

But to accomplish so much, you must follow also the other direction of the text:—

2. *Watch unto prayer*. Prayer, humble, believing, affectionate, persevering prayer, in the name of Christ, and for the purpose of promoting his glory and the salvation of men, is, in its influence, omnipresent, in its results, omnipotent. By it a person may do good at home and abroad; throughout the city in which he lives, throughout the country, and throughout the world; and he may continue to do good throughout all future ages. *Open your mouths wide*, saith God, *and I will fill them*. In answer to prayer, blind eyes may be opened, and deaf ears be unstopped; the lame man made to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing; in the wilderness waters to break

out, and streams in the desert ; the highway to become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water ; and through the habitation of dragons, a highway may be opened, on which the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads.

In answer probably to the prayers of Richard Baxter, his "Call to the unconverted," is now awakening many sinners, and his "Saint's Rest," guiding multitudes of Christians to glory. In answer to the prayers of Paul, the angel having the everlasting gospel to preach unto all nations, may now be flying through the midst of heaven.

The prayers of David for Zion, the city of our God, as her watchmen stand on her walls, see eye to eye, and proclaim the glories of her King, may now be receiving their fulfilment.

And the prayers of Abraham, for the multitude of nations promised to him, may now be receiving their fulfilment.

Let any man pray like Paul, like David, and Abraham, and no tongue can tell the greatness or the extent of the blessings, which, in answer, may descend. One blessing such a man will certainly secure ;—*his own eternal life*. Yes, "whosoever thus calleth on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." And he may be the means of saving others, in greater and still greater numbers, from generation to generation, down to the end of the world. And as ages unnumbered roll away, a revenue of ever increasing glory, may, in answer to his prayers, redound to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And is not here motive enough to lead every Christian, every day, in secret and in his family, to call upon God ? and to offer that humble, believing, affectionate, persevering prayer, which avails so much ? I do not say, in that case, that there will certainly be a revival of true religion which will spread over this whole city and country ; but I do say, that you may expect it ; and if there should be such a revival, I do not say that your children will all be partakers, but I do say that you may hope for it. And if they should be born of the Spirit, have heaven for their home, and God for their eternal portion, what more can you wish for them ? They will hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; the Lamb himself will lead them to fountains of living water, and will wipe away forever all tears from their eyes. Should you die before you see such a change, and be with cherubim and seraphim in glory, *there you may learn*, by the tidings brought upward, that they have repented in answer to your prayers ; and that the number of penitents is increasing, and increasing, till revival meets revival, and the whole earth is filled with the glory of God.

Pray then, my hearers, with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, and you shall have the benefit of such prayers while you live, and when you die : and after you arrive in glory, you may witness multitudes, in answer to your supplications when on earth, coming up to join with you, and with the ten thousand times ten thousand, in that grand alleluia,—BLESSING AND HONOR, AND GLORY, AND POWER, BE UNTO HIM THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE, AND TO THE LAMB FOR EVER AND EVER.